Michelle Ann Capasso
Research Associate
Clearlake Capital Group
1823 West 3rd Street
Brooklyn, NY 11223
michellec@clearlakecapital.com

I became involved with the needs of speech disabled indirectly through my company's connection with the hearing impaired and Deaf community. After learning more about the critical value relay service provide for the community I was working with, I realized how important it is for everyone to have equal access to communications. I learned about speech-to-speech from the FCC website and then began researching more about it and saw that it also fills a critical need in the lives of people with speech disabilities and as such should be fully supported.

I believe that the FCC should allow competition for STS. If you look at the IP Relay and VRS markets, competition has GREATLY improved the service for users. The major players are constantly bringing out new products. In addition, each company fights to find the best interpreters and keep the quality of interpreting top notch. If STS was competitive, the operators might be training to take the time to really develop a relationship with their customer to get used to the way the person speaks and therefore increase the quality of communication. Competition could allow for higher pay for operator, greater training for operators AND user and more outreach to let people know that STS exists! Competitors could innovate easier way for STS users to reach the service. IP Relay service providers even have Facebook applications to help young hearing impaired kids talk to their friends! And just like in IP, the FCC needs to help stop being from abusing the system. If calls from a relay operator are constantly being hung up on by businesses because they are scared of fraud or think the call is a joke, that is NOT providing equal access for legitimate STS users. STS is a great service but the quality needs to improve and the word about STS needs to get spread! Grassroots organizations have done their part, but not it is time to help them along and truly allow equal access for all.